

Passenger Service on the D&H Gravity Railroad, Carbondale to Honesdale (Part I)

By S. Robert Powell, Ph.D.

In the spring of 1860, the D&H established regular passenger service on its Gravity Railroad between Carbondale and Providence (see *BLHS Bulletin*, April 2020, pp. 16-18). In late May, 1863, under the direction of Superintendent Rollin Manville, the first passenger car on the Gravity Railroad between Carbondale and Honesdale made a round trip between Honesdale and Waymart.

News spread very quickly to Carbondale of this passenger car run from Honesdale to Waymart and return, and the *Carbondale Advance*, in its issue of June 6, 1863, observed that it would be a great convenience to have regular passenger and mail trains between Carbondale and Honesdale, and asked: "Could not some means be devised to do this?"

An initial step in that direction was taken during the first week of November of 1863, when "well filled" passenger cars were put on the Gravity line daily between Honesdale and Carbondale to accommodate Wayne County conscripts for the Civil War on their way to Easton.

A major step in that direction was taken five years later when the 1868 configuration of the Gravity Railroad was installed. The most remarkable feature of this new configuration was Level No. 20, which was a new light car track, from Farview to Carbondale (six miles) and to Archbald (fourteen miles). Over this new light track, the empty coal cars moved down the mountain by gravity, eliminating the use of two ascending and eight descending planes.

For the greater part of its length this track (which was not contiguous with the loaded track) wound in and out among the hills, along precipitous cliffs and through ravines and little valleys. Curving to the left from the light track at the foot of return plane No. 8 it ran southwesterly to No. 4 reservoir where it curved to the right and ran northerly and, crossing over the loaded track near the head of No. 5 plane, continued for some distance.

Then, after a cut into the side of the mountain, an abrupt turn or loop was made on a huge embankment. This abrupt turn or loop on a huge embankment was known as Shepherds Crook. It was about four hundred feet in diameter and two thousand feet in length, with a grade of one hundred and ten feet to the mile. At the lower end of the loop, the track returned to within eighty-two feet of itself, horizontally, thirty-seven feet below its upper end.

At the lower end of Shepherd's Crook, the track continued in a southerly direction, re-crossing the loaded track just above the foot of Plane No. 3, to Carbondale.

With the opening of Level 20 on April 21, 1868, it was rumored that the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company, upon the completion of the Jefferson Railroad from Hawley into Honesdale about the 1st of June, would place a passenger car on their road, between Honesdale and Waymart, and then Carbondale, as an experiment.

In support of this Honesdale/Carbondale passenger initiative, it was noted that passenger service up and down the Lackawanna Valley on the D&H Valley Road between Carbondale and Providence was not only already in place but also highly successful. In addition, Superintendent Manville had made, under the supervision of Thomas Orchard Esq., "some elegant passenger cars" at the D&H car shops in Carbondale for passenger service up and down the Lackawanna Valley.

In the June 28, 1873 issue of the *Carbondale Advance* we read the following about one of the elegant passenger cars, the *Monitor*, got up under the supervision of Thomas Orchard, Esq. at their shops in this city: "One of them is now ready for use, and is a model of strength and artistic beauty and taste. The panel work, the windows and doors, the upholstering, the ventilators are all beautiful, and skillfully constructed. We believe the work is not surpassed in the best shops in Concord, Troy or Philadelphia."

With elegant passenger coaches now at hand, and with the new light track from Farview to Carbondale and Archbald (Level 20) open, a very important first step towards regular passenger service on the D&H between Carbondale and Honesdale was taken when the *Monitor* was put into service on the line to Honesdale as a convenient and easy means of transportation now available to those who wished to explore the scenic beauty of sites on the Moosic Mountain above Carbondale, the most remarkable of which was the Shepherd's Crook and Panther Bluffs area.

Not surprisingly, by the summer of 1874, "pic-nic" excursions to Shepherd's Crook via the Gravity Railroad were a regular feature of summertime activity in Carbondale. How did those excursion groups get to Shepherd's Crook? Two possibilities: the D&H passenger car, the *Monitor*, was taken up the mountain and then switched to the light track, either at the head of Plane No. 5 or at the head of Plane No. 8, for the trip down the mountain via Shepherd's Crook.

Upon their arrival at Shepherd's Crook--which was not a station stop, and where there was not even a platform-- the *Monitor* was stopped and the excursionists descended and went into the woods for a pic-nic and to enjoy

the mountain scenery and the waterfalls. Here is a very interesting account from the *Carbondale Advance* of a trip taken to Shepherd's Crook on Thursday, July 9, 1874, by a group of 30 excursionists from Carbondale:

"Pic-Nic. / A party of some twenty or thirty of our young people took a picnic excursion to Shepherd's Crook on Thursday. They left the city by car 'Monitor,' D. & H. RR., and after a rapid run up a half dozen planes, pursued the gentle declivity which leads to the Crook. Arrived at their destination, the provisions were conveyed about a quarter of a mile into the woods, and deposited upon the banks of a mountain rivulet where the water dashes wildly but picturesquely over high Falls. From this point the happy young couples branched out in all directions through the woods, rambling over rocks and through thickets with hearts devoid of care. The rain which set in did not interfere with the dinner programme, but, continuing, it caused a general stampede for the "Monitor" about 1 o'clock. After a spirited and enjoyable run, the little car landed its precious freight once again at the Company's office. The general sentiment of the young people was that it was the most pleasant affair of the kind that they had ever attended." (*Carbondale Advance*, July 11, 1874, p. 3)

In early August 1874, another excursion outing went to Shepherd's Crook in the *Monitor*, via the Gravity Railroad: **"Shepherd's Crook Again.** / "On Monday last a small party visited the glen near Shepherd's Crook, on the D. & H. Gravity road, being conveyed thither by the snug little car *Monitor*. We understand it was a very pleasant affair." (*Carbondale Advance*, August 8, 1874, p. 3)

Passenger outings from Honesdale to the summit of the Moosic Mountain and then down to Shepherd's Crook and then down to Carbondale were soon arranged. In the *Honesdale Citizen* of May 20, 1875 we read: "The parlor car, *Passaic*, took a sight seeing party over the Del & Hud road to the top of the mountain, on Monday afternoon."

In June 1875, "a select company of Scrantonians, numbering about ninety, accompanied by the Hyde Park Band" arrived in Carbondale for an excursion outing to Honesdale and Shepherd's Crook on the Gravity Railroad. They were joined by a delegation of about 40 Carbondaleans and together they journeyed by the Gravity Railroad to Honesdale, where they made an official visit to the Allen House and enjoyed for an hour and a half "the fine scenery and charming shade" of Honesdale, before again boarding cars on the Gravity Railroad for the trip to Shepherd's Crook. There they descended from the cars and picnicked in woods and enjoyed the mountain scenery and the waterfalls there. At 4 o'clock the excursionists departed for Carbondale. After the "Carbondalers" had descended, at the Hendrick's Avenue station, the Scranton group continued on the Gravity Railroad to Archbald (the end of Level 20) and then took the steam train from Archbald

to Scranton. (An extensive account of this outing was published in the *Carbondale Advance*, June 19, 1875, p. 2.)

Given the huge success of this excursion to Elk Falls near Shepherd's Crook, the wish for more such excursions to the same site was verbalized generally. Such excursions would not be difficult to make a reality, as the writer who wrote the following brief article for the *Carbondale Advance* makes very clear: "Since the delightful picnic on Tuesday at Elk Falls, near Shepherd's Crook, the question has been broached, 'Why cannot we have many a picnic at this delightful spot?' If a car can be chartered, the place can be reached by going to the summit, and then returning by the 'empty track' to the crook. To get back to town take cars on the same track to Hendrick's avenue, thence by carriages or afoot to the heart of town." (*Carbondale Advance*, June 19, 1875, p. 3)

On July 27, 1875, a large party of Honesdale boys and girls traveled across the D&H's cloud capped peaks in the *Passaic*: "A very large party of Honesdale girls and boy went across the Del. & Hud. Co's cloud capped peaks on Tuesday last, occupying the beautiful car, *Passaic*, also an open car." (*Honesdale Citizen*, July 29, 1875)

By the spring of 1876, petitions were in circulation, asking the D&H to put a regular passenger train on the Gravity Railroad: "Petitions, signed by many citizens, asking the Delaware & Hudson C. Co. to put a passenger train on the gravity road, are in circulation. Give us a train!--*Honesdale Citizen*." (*Carbondale Advance*, April 29, 1876, p. 3)

On Wednesday, June 28, 1876, another huge excursion of between three and four hundred Scrantonians, accompanied by Diller's Orchestra of Scranton, came to Carbondale for the purpose of taking the Gravity Railroad to Shepherd's Crook and there to picnic. They were joined by 50 or 60 Carbondalers and the entire party traveled to Shepherd's Crook on twelve rail cars [emphasis added] that had been fitted up for the occasion by Superintendent Manville. Once at Shepherd's Crook, the picnicked in the woods, listened to speeches, danced, and enjoyed the alpine environment. At 4:30 P.M. they took the Gravity Railroad to Archbald, and there the Scrantonians got the 5:30 P.M. steam train to Scranton. The members of the party from Carbondale took the Gravity Railroad back to Carbondale.

The account of this joyous outing that is given in the *Carbondale Advance* of July 1, 1876, concludes with this amazing statement: "The grand mountainous scenery, the novel mode of transportation, the bracing air and propitious weather, the jolly crowd and exhilarating recreation, all combined to make the trip one of the best and most pleasant in the history of picnic excursions in this section of country."

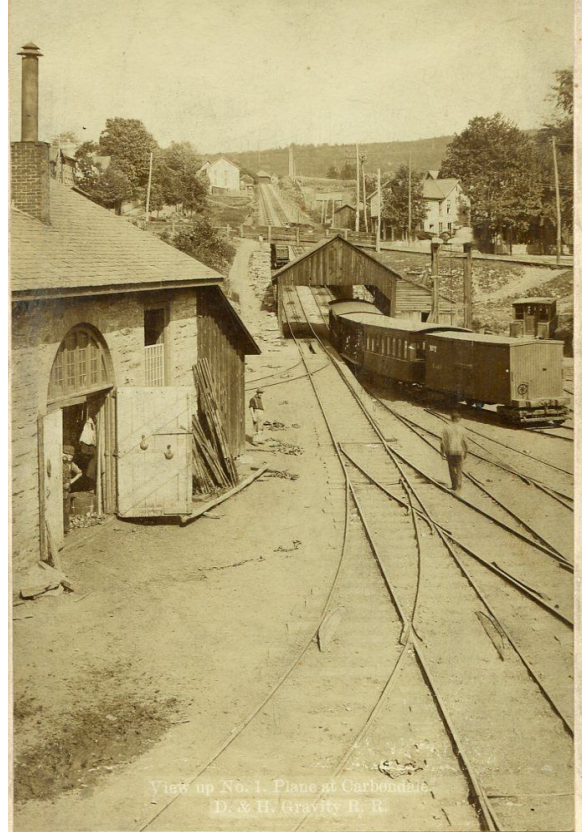
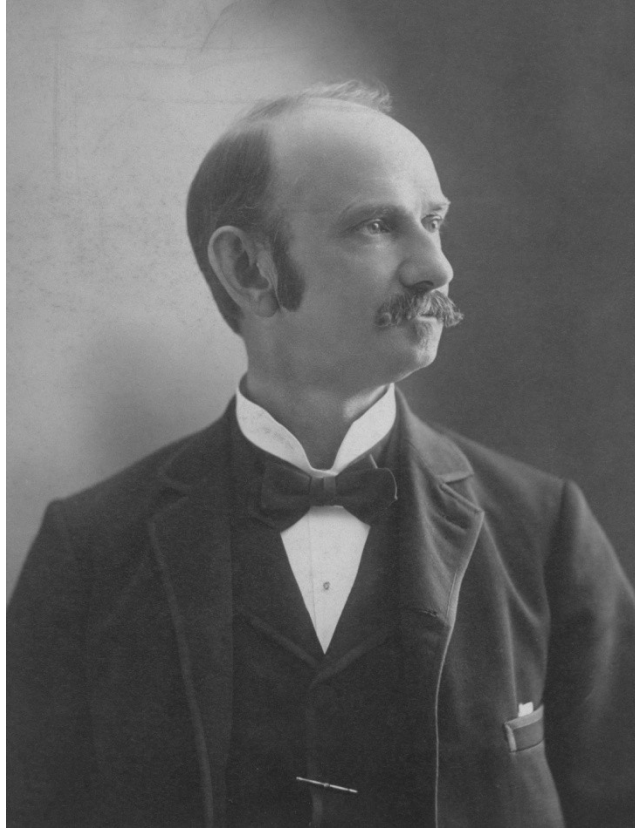
In July 1876, the D&H announced that there would be excursion trains run on the D&H Gravity between Waymart and Honesdale on the Fourth of July.

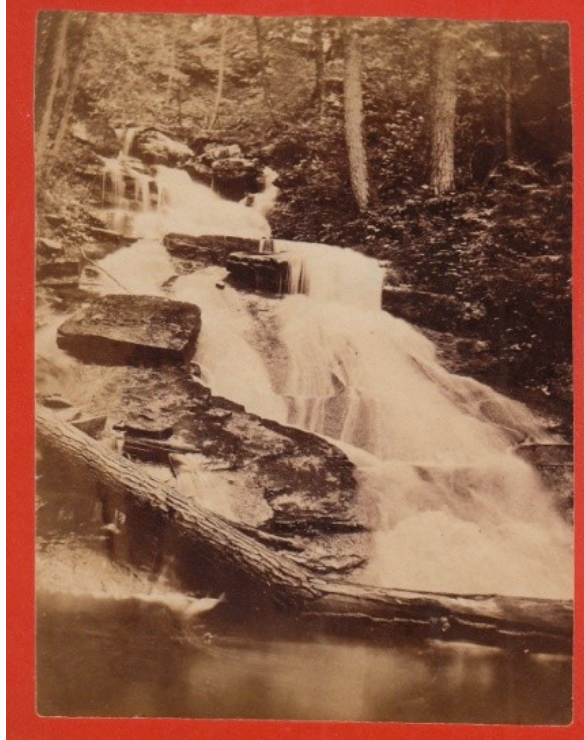
Given the great popularity of these excursions to the summit of the Moosic Mountain and to Shepherd's Crooks, it is not at all surprising that the D&H established at this time regular passenger service between Carbondale and Honesdale. In the *Carbondale Leader* of April 7, 18977, we read:

"A passenger train is henceforth to be run over the gravity road between Carbondale and Honesdale. The running of trains commenced on Thursday morning [April 5] of this week. Two trains will be run daily [the *Moosic* and the *Monitor* with tenders]. The first one leaves Carbondale at 8:15 a. m. and the second at 3:15 p. m. Leave Honesdale at 7:30 a. m. and 2:45 p. m. The fare will be eighty cents [Twenty cents more expensive than by stage coach.] This enterprise renders communication between the two places much more pleasant and quick than it has formerly been, and will be taken advantage of by the travelling public. The trip will be a very pleasant one during the summer. [William Rosser ran the trains from Carbondale to Honesdale and return, and Samuel Penwarden ran the ones from Honesdale to Carbondale and return.] We understand that this was brought about mainly by the influence of Honesdale people. The stage [operated by Ed Wood] will undoubtedly have to be withdrawn in course of time and the mail carried over the gravity road." (*Carbondale Leader*, April 7, 1877, p. 3)

The passenger cars on the Gravity Railroad, which weighed 16,000 pounds, traveled at 25-35 miles per hour, with a three-man crew: conductor and two brakemen.

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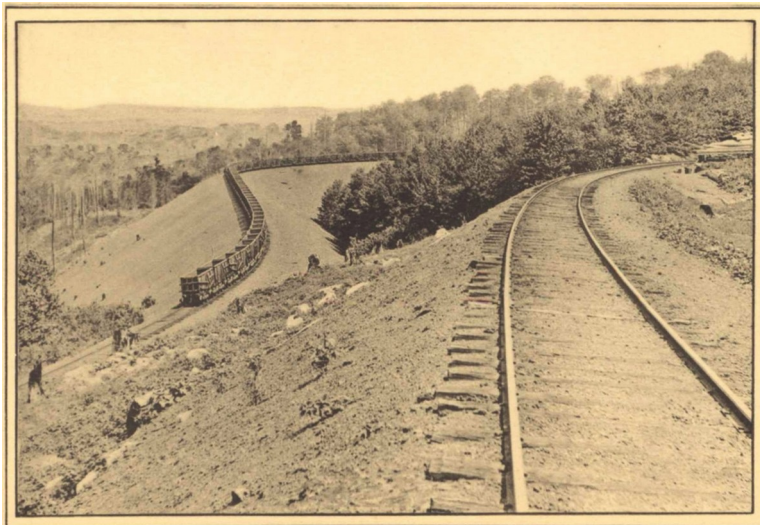
Souvenir of the

GRAVITY ROAD

Photo-Gravures of the Old Delaware and Hudson Coal and Passenger
Road, between Carbondale and Honesdale, Pa. ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

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SHEPARD'S CROOK.

W. B. Foster, Carbondale above

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